

# SWEET SHRUB

(*Calycanthus floridus*)

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Most people plant trees and plants for a specific reason, whether it's to produce timber, attract wildlife, or provide shade or a buffer. There's one plant, although not very pretty, that is planted for its incredible smell – the sweet shrub.

Sometimes called “Carolina allspice,” “strawberry bush,” “bubbly blossom,” “spicebush,” or “Sweet Betty,” the sweet shrub is one of the most fragrant flowers of the forest. For many people the smell can be nostalgic because it reminds us of the bush that was planted outside the living room window of our grandparents’ or parents’ home that provided such a delicious soft sweet smell on cool spring nights. This plant has been providing our gardens and yards with aromatic delight for almost 200 years. The sweet shrub was originally found by Mark Catesby and introduced to Charleston gardens in the 18th century from which it spread throughout the colonies.

The bush is native to the southern and mid-Atlantic states and grows about five to ten feet tall and grows considerably



wider. The leaves are elliptical, pointed, entire, dark green and rough above and grayish, downy below. They are two to three inches long and opposite. The shrub is deciduous with beautiful yellow fall color.

The flowers are dark red, maroon, or brown curved linear petals, 1½ to 1¼ inches in size, resembling a strawberry. They fill the woods and yards with an unusual fruit aroma that has been described as similar to strawberries, bubble gum, honey, pineapple, or a mixture of any of the above. Seedlings of the bush are not usually fragrant. Fruit is ovoid, leathery, nodding capsule, 1½ inches long.

Sweet shrub will grow in most in any well-drained soil and will tolerate both sun and shade.

**Author's Note:** A yellow flowered variety can be purchased from many nurseries. Called “Athens,” this shrub grows up to six feet or larger and spreads over ten feet or more in time. The incredibly fragrant flower blooms heavily in May and continues into June and July. 🌸



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